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Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

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[Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water](#)

Associated Press

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Marin water supplier urges voluntary conservation
Mark Prado
Article Launched: 04/12/2007 01:20:40 AM PDT

(San Jose Mercury News)This winter's minimal rain prompted the Sonoma County Water Agency - which provides water to Marin - to call for immediate voluntary water conservation because of "dangerously low water supply levels" expected in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall.

Water released from the lake is critical to the drinking water supply for 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, to the habitat of threatened salmon species and for recreation at the lake and along the Russian River, said Brad Sherwood, agency spokesman.

"We are asking all our customers for between 10 and 15 percent conservation," said Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer for the agency. "We realize we are not at the end of the rainy season, so we will analyze things again in six weeks. But we want to be proactive and get ahead of this."

The North Marin Water District - which serves Novato - gets 80 percent of its water from the Sonoma agency.

"Our board has not taken any action yet" on Sonoma's request for conservation, said Ryan Grisso, North Marin's water conservation coordinator. "But we are ready for this type of situation."

Grisso noted the district has recently enacted tiered rates, in which charges are higher for those who use more water. That is expected to cut water use.

"It's been a dry year and that's the issue," Grisso said. "We will work closely with the Sonoma County Water Agency on this."

North Marin's remaining 20 percent of supply comes from Stafford Lake in Novato, which is at 99 percent capacity, Grisso said.

The Marin Municipal Water District serves residents from San Rafael south, and gets about 25 percent of its water from the Sonoma agency.

"We are evaluating the Sonoma County Water Agency's announcement," said David Behar, Marin Municipal Water District board member. "But as we look at conserving locally, that 25 percent we get from Sonoma has a role in our plan."

This year Marin Municipal has reported 32.5 inches of rain to date, compared with an average of 48 inches.

Despite the lack of rain, the district reservoirs are at 86 percent capacity, only 4 percent below average.

"That is because of last year's heavy rains, but we will still talk about voluntary conservation measures at our next board meeting," Behar said. "These measures are things people should not be doing anyway, like watering in the middle of the day." Daytime watering was recently banned in Santa Cruz.

If there is no rain from now until summer and the temperatures heat up, there is a chance there could be rationing, but the district is not there yet, Behar said.

"More rain would be nice, but we can't control that," Behar said.

Contact Mark Prado via e-mail at mprado@marinij.com; Bay City News service contributed to this report.

Conservation may call for cooperation
By CHRIS COURSEY
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The old bumper sticker "Save water -- shower with a friend" was funny, unless you lived through the drought of 1976-1977.

No one was laughing through that winter 30 years ago when California and the rest of the West dried up and shriveled like a plum on its way to becoming a prune.

The memories came flooding (sorry) back this week with the Sonoma County Water Agency's call for voluntary water conservation in the face of "dangerously low" levels in the Russian River water system.

Lake Mendocino, the Russian River reservoir near Ukiah that supplies water to residents of both Mendocino and Sonoma counties, is forecast to drop to 8,000 acre-feet of stored water by October. That's lower than it dropped in 1977.

"It's real scary," said Mendocino County water official Judy Hatch.

Pam Jeane, manager of Sonoma County's water distribution system, said residents need to cut back 10 to 15 percent now in order to avoid mandatory restrictions later.

All of this could change, of course, with a couple of good storms. But even though the bone-dry weather pattern has moistened up a bit of late, the likelihood of significant rainfall gets smaller with the passing of each lovely spring day.

And we get closer to 1977.

That winter three decades ago was actually the second straight rainy season without much rain. The previous year had brought only 15.71 inches of rain. Then came 1976-1977, when just 13.06 inches fell on Santa Rosa. It was -- and still is -- the driest year on record.

We're in better shape today, rain-wise. Last year, Santa Rosa recorded more than 43 inches of rain. This year, to date, we've received 17.76.

We've also got Warm Springs Dam, which today has more than 243,000 acre-feet of water stored in Lake Sonoma. That, however, is offset by the fact that there are about 200,000 more people using that water than were here 30 years ago.

And even though we have more ability to store water, we probably have less ability to conserve it. Because of our experience with droughts in the '70s, late '80s and early '90s, we aren't as wasteful with water as we once were. Therefore, we probably can't cut back as much as we once could.

By March 1, 1977 -- the day that mandatory water rationing was last imposed in Sonoma County -- water customers in Santa Rosa already had cut consumption by more than 25 percent over the previous year. Getting to the target of 30 percent wasn't much of a stretch.

It was accomplished in ways large and small, from letting lawns turn brown to flushing toilets less often ("Blush, don't flush"). New wells were drilled by private citizens and municipalities in the search for water; clouds were seeded in hopes of squeezing out more rain.

Almost no water-saving idea was too far-fetched, although no icebergs were towed from Alaska to California and "no-shave Wednesdays" were never officially mandated, as suggested by one state legislator.

As an arid spring turned into a bone-dry summer, Santa Rosa put a cap on the number of building permits it issued, and residents were ordered to limit household water use to 100 gallons a day per person.

Today, most of us can't conserve by putting bricks in the toilet tank -- we've already switched to 1.6-gallon flushers from the 4- to 7-gallon models that were prevalent in the '70s. We've installed low-flow showerheads and drought-tolerant landscaping and learned to turn off the water while we brush our teeth.

All of which means it may be harder to reduce water use by the 10 to 15 percent officials say is necessary to avoid rationing.

Unless we all cooperate, as in:

You do my back, and I'll do yours.

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<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070413/NEWS/704130361/1065/NEWS06>

Lake may be nearly empty by fall
By BEN BROWN
The Ukiah Daily Journal

Water levels in Lake Mendocino will drop to 8,000 acre feet by fall if customers do not start conserving, according to projections from the Sonoma County Water Agency.

"That's about 9 percent of capacity," said SCWA programs specialist Brad Sherwood. "It's never gotten that low."

"You will see the lake level drop much faster than in previous years," said Roland Sanford, general manager of the Mendocino County Water Agency.

The total storage of Lake Mendocino as of Wednesday was 69,208 acre/feet of water. Maximum storage is 122,500 acre/feet. Sanford said if the storage gets below 44,000 acre/feet, it will render the boat ramps unusable.

Sherwood said the SCWA is encouraging its customers to begin voluntarily conserving water.

"That's probably going to get ratcheted up as the year goes on," he said.

Sherwood said he was not sure if it will even be possible to draw water out of the lake if the level drops to 8,000 acre-feet.

Lower than average rainfall this year, combined with a decision by PG&E to reduce flows through the Potter Valley Project, which feeds into Lake Mendocino, by 33 percent, is being cited as the reason the lake level is expected to drop.

Sherwood said the reduced flows are translating into 400 acre/feet less water flowing into the lake every day.

"Those Potter Valley inflows are killing us," he said.

PG&E has said it is complying with its license as written by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

"This is the exact reason people around here who follow this are so concerned," Sanford said. Sanford said low water levels in the lake will also have an impact on fish. Low water in the fall means there will be little cold water for the Chinook Salmon that swim up the Russian River to spawn.

In addition to the reduced flows, a statewide shortage of rain has reduced the water in the lake even further. The dry year also means more water will be required for irrigation.

"It's basically going to be a two-month longer irrigation season," Sherwood said.

The announcement comes following a report from the U.S. Forest Service that snow levels and water content in the Mendocino National Forest are less than half what they normally are this time of year.

Sherwood said there is still a month left in the rain year, but added it's unlikely a late storm will move in and fill the lake.

"We're not optimistic," he said.

Ben Brown can be reached at udjbb@pacific.net.

Save water now, or lose it later

Water agency wants residents to cut use by 10 to 15 percent to avoid restrictions in summer

By BLEYS ROSE

AND MARY CALLAHAN THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The last time Denise Adlington made a major dent in her household water use, it was largely because her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend moved out.

Adlington joked that she still has a teenage son prone to endless showers she could unload, but short of that she's pinning her hopes for water conservation on replacing her lawn and landscaping with "more water-friendly" plants.

She's already installed a more efficient water heater, low-flow faucets and toilets, and a clothes washer that uses less water than the old one.

With projections for a record-low water supply this summer, North Coast water officials hope everyone starts to think like Adlington.

Thursday, they called on 750,000 residents of Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties to voluntarily and immediately reduce water use by 10 percent to 15 percent in hopes of avoiding mandatory restrictions later.

Lack of rainfall and mandatory minimum flows upriver from Coyote Dam could combine to halt any pumping out of Lake Mendocino by September, according to the Sonoma County Water Agency.

"We are praying for rain at this point," said water agency deputy chief engineer Pam Jeane. "We believe that with conservation of 10 to 15 percent right now, there might not have to be a call for mandatory restrictions later."

Even some residents who've already upgraded their plumbing, landscaped with drought-tolerant plants and made other lifestyle changes said they're willing to do what's necessary -- if they can.

"We will do it," said Birgitt Jacobsen, who added she limits herself to showers every second day.

She and her husband, Finn, said their San Rafael home stands out from others in the neighborhood because of its limited, drought-tolerant landscaping.

For some, however, there are stumbling blocks -- like the "tons of roses" at Bill Passaretti's Roseland home.

"I'm not going to live without them," said Passaretti, who said he otherwise thinks about water conservation "every day" and is diligent about taking steps to use only what's needed.

Water agency officials said they're hoping education will convey the need for everyone to conserve -- both because of the shortage in supply and because of the potential environmental impacts.

"We are under a historical and unprecedented situation here, based on the projections," agency spokesman Brad Sherwood said. "We could see lake levels in Mendocino that we've never seen before."

Some fear many people will conserve only if it hits them in the pocketbook.

"There are a lot of cities here in Sonoma County that have never metered the water, and unfortunately I think for most people, if it's not costing money, I don't think a lot of them are going to change," said Kate Burroughs, who, with her husband, owns Sebastopol's Harmony Farm Supply, which specializes in drip irrigation and offers drought-tolerant plants.

Ralph Avalon, an estimator for Petaluma-based Dibble Landscaping, said the firm has a large customer base in affluent Marin County willing and able to pay for whatever water they need, and thus are unmotivated to think about landscaping for conservation.

Similarly, Santa Rosa husband and father Gonzalo Esquivel said he's tried for 15 years to impress on his wife and two daughters the need for efficient water use -- especially when it comes to showers.

"I think that as long as Daddy's paying the bills, it doesn't matter to them," he said.

Water agency officials and Sonoma County supervisors made their pitch for voluntary reductions during a news conference attended by all Bay Area network news stations at the Healdsburg Memorial Beach fish ladder Thursday.

Bay Area water officials made similar calls Wednesday, saying inadequate Sierra snowpack indicated drought conditions were likely this summer.

In Sonoma County, water agency officials said they're looking at a dire combination of little rain, low Lake Mendocino levels, state-mandated water releases into the Russian River and limits on releases from the Potter Valley Dam.

Supervisor Tim Smith said Potter Valley water releases, which heavily affect levels downriver at Lake Mendocino, have dropped from 180,000 acre-feet in 1998 to 105,000 last year.

Smith said supervisors would attempt to get relief from state-mandated flow levels but added it was more crucial to convince residents of the gravity of the water supply situation and the need for conservation.

The water agency supplies all residents of Sonoma County except those with private wells and people who live in Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Sebastopol and Forestville.

Authority for voluntary measures stems from water-sharing agreements the water agency customers signed last June. The measures are set by the California Urban Water Conservation Council (www.cuwcc.org), which represents 350 public water agencies.

Those measures include:

Curbing use of potable water for car washing.

Using lawn and plant irrigation controllers that adjust for weather conditions.

Buying high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow toilets and showerheads, front-loading clothes washers and reduced-flow faucets.

More conservation measures are available at [sonomacounty water.org](http://sonomacountywater.org).

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<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070413/NEWS/704130343/1033/NEWS01>

County may face water woes
By Sandi Hansen
Index-Tribune Staff Writer

Water agency urges immediate conservation efforts

The Sonoma County Water Agency has announced projections that water sources used by portions of Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties are in danger of reaching historically low levels as early as the beginning of this fall if no significant rainfall comes soon and people don't start seriously conserving water usage.

According to agency officials, water levels in Lake Mendocino could drop to approximately 10,000 acre-feet, which is the level the lake reached during the 1976-77 drought. (One acre-foot equals about 325,850 gallons of water.)

Lake Mendocino plays an important role in providing drinking water to about 750,000 residents in the three counties, including Sonoma Valley. The Russian River is fed, in part, by water from the Eel River, and in turn feeds into Lake Mendocino. The Russian River is a major source of water supply that the water agency sells to water contractors including the Valley of the Moon Water District and the City of Sonoma.

The water agency wants to educate the public and agricultural community about the low water supply projections, according to Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Tim Smith.

"Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts," Smith said at a news conference Thursday on Memorial Beach at the Russian River in Healdsburg.

"The projections are alarming to us," said Pam Jeane, the water agency's deputy chief engineer of operations. "We have looked at a similar type of climate year in 2002 and taken information on Lake Mendocino levels and applied it to this year using existing storage levels. Our projection is showing we could be well below what is comfortable in the fall."

"The unusually dry springs we have experienced in recent years have made it difficult to fill Lake Mendocino to capacity and may be due to global warming," said Chris Murray, the water agency's principal engineer.

Rainfall in the agency's service area is about 60 percent of normal this year. There has also been a reduction in water flows from PG&E's Potter Valley Project on the Eel River and an increased demand for water from the area's agricultural industry.

Sonoma Valley is currently faring better than the northern part of the county, according to Murray. "We have to appreciate that the agricultural community uses very little water per acre of crop grown, and that most of the agriculture being targeted is along the Russian River north to Ukiah, not so much in the southern Valley," Murray added.

Protecting the chinook salmon is also a major priority of the agency. In 2006, nearly 4,500 chinook were in the upper Russian River during the same time the current projection indicates low water levels in Lake Mendocino this year. "Due to the low level of water released in the upper Russian River, migration and spawning of the salmon will be carefully monitored to avoid any negative impacts," said Sean White, the water agency's principal environmental specialist.

Regardless of where one lives in Sonoma County or what the overall water usage has been in the past, county officials are asking everyone to make an effort to conserve between 10 and 15 percent beginning immediately. "While cutting back 15 percent may seem small, it is significant at the end of the season, and it's a lot better than having nothing left," said White.

County officials think people are generally listening more to the message of water conservation. Murray said most of the conservation measures the agency wants implemented won't drastically change people's everyday lives. "We're not asking them to change their lifestyles ... we want them to be able to flush toilets, water their lawn, wash their car ... but in changing their thinking maybe they will realize they don't need to do some particular thing."

Meanwhile, the City of Sonoma and Valley of the Moon Water District have already been asking people to conserve water for some time. Al Bandur, Sonoma public works administrator, said every summer the city asks residents to voluntarily reduce 15 percent of their water use through efficient landscaping, fixing leaks, purchasing low-flow toilets and front-load washing machines and taking advantage of free low-flow shower heads.

In its recent renovation of the Plaza duck pond, Bandur said that part of the rehabilitation program was installing recirculating water in both the City Hall fish fountain and the duck pond. "We're saving 876,000 gallons a year with these new systems," said Bandur.

He added that a typical Sonoma Valley household uses 115,000 gallons of water a year.

Valley of the Moon Water District General Manager Krishna Kumar said he thinks that people should be keeping conservation in their minds no matter what the season. "Water conservation is a prudent policy at all times." The district has a list of 30 smart ways to save on summer water bills if any customers are interested. It also has a list of five ongoing water conservation tips that will save water, money and energy immediately. Kumar added. "These ideas are painless to implement and require some minor changes to our water-use habits."

http://www.sonomanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1868&Itemid=2



Press Release

For Immediate Release
April 12, 2007

Contact:
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Lake Mendocino Water Supply Projected to Reach Unprecedented Low Levels

***Agency seeks 10-15% reduction in water demand through
voluntary water conservation efforts***

Santa Rosa, CA – The Sonoma County Water Agency today projected that Lake Mendocino may reach historically low water supply levels as early as this September. According to the Agency, unless significant rainfall occurs this spring, or water use is reduced, water levels in Lake Mendocino will drop to about 10,000 acre-feet. The last time Lake Mendocino reached similar water levels was during the 1976 drought. Lake Mendocino water storage is currently about 69,000 acre-feet. Water storage has been falling by 200-300 acre-feet per day for the past several weeks as the Agency releases water to maintain state-required minimum streamflows. The Agency is seeking to reduce urban and agricultural water demand by 10 to 15 percent by calling on municipal customers and the agricultural community to immediately implement voluntary water conservation efforts.

Lake Mendocino water plays a significant role in providing drinking water to about 750,000 residents in portions of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties, habitat for threatened Chinook salmon, and an array of recreational opportunities both in Lake Mendocino and along the Russian River.

“We are taking a proactive role in educating the public, agricultural community, and our water contractors about these low water supply projections released,” said Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Tim Smith. “Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts.”

Projected Lake Mendocino water supply levels are based on the lack of rain, reduced water flows from PG&E’s Potter Valley Project, and demand from agricultural and Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino County urban water users.

Lack of Rain: Rainfall in the Agency’s service area is about sixty percent of normal this year. Although the recent showers have been refreshing, weather forecasts indicate no major storm systems approaching the region within the month. Last year’s rainfall has played a vital role in providing this year’s water supply.

“The unusually dry springs we have experienced in recent years have made it difficult to fill Lake Mendocino to capacity and may be due to global warming,” said Chris Murray, principal engineer.

Potter Valley Project Flow Reductions: Water flows into Lake Mendocino from the Potter Valley Project have been reduced by thirty-three percent this year. The Potter Valley Project diverts Eel River water through a Mendocino County powerhouse owned and operated by PG&E into the upper Russian River Basin, and is the source of most of the summer flow in the East Branch Russian River. In 2004, federal regulatory agencies ordered a new water flow regime for the Potter Valley Project. This new regime changed the minimum and maximum stream flow requirements for the East Branch Russian River.

Agricultural and Urban Water Demand: Nearly sixty thousand acres of agricultural land is irrigated with water from the upper Russian River. Agricultural irrigation normally increases as temperatures rise and dry weather holds during the summer months. Urban water demand also increases during the summer months due to outdoor watering. Combined, both agricultural and urban water demand will further strain the already low water supply from Lake Mendocino and the upper Russian River.

The Agency will immediately begin meeting with state and federal officials to address the concerns about the projection and associated risks. The Agency will also schedule public workshops in the coming months to begin the dialogue with stakeholders necessary to develop amendments to State Water Board Decision 1610. As the local sponsor for both the Warm Springs and Coyote Valley Dams, the Agency has the right to store and release water from the water supply pools of both reservoirs. The Agency must however meet minimum required flows in the Russian River set by the State Water Resources Control Board in 1986 when it issued its Decision 1610. Under Decision 1610, the Agency has been required to maintain stream flows above 185 cubic feet per second (cfs) at a gauging station near Healdsburg.

At the same time when Lake Mendocino levels are projected to hit approximately 10,000 acre-feet, Chinook salmon will begin to migrate and spawn in the upper Russian River.

“Due to the low level of water released in the upper Russian River, migration and spawning of Chinook salmon will be carefully monitored to avoid any negative impacts,” said Sean White, senior environmental specialist.

The Agency monitors fish passing at its inflatable rubber dam through two fish ladders near Wohler Bridge upstream from Guerneville on the Russian River. In 2006, about 4,500 Chinook salmon were in the upper Russian River at the same time the projection indicates low water levels in Lake Mendocino this year.

“By conserving water today, we can reduce the amount of water that is being used for watering lawns, and instead use that water for Chinook salmon that need the water to survive,” said Agency Director and Sonoma County Supervisor Paul Kelley. Water conservation tips, programs and rebates are available through local water suppliers and the Agency’s website at www.sonomacountywater.org.

About Lake Mendocino:

Lake Mendocino is located three miles northeast of the City of Ukiah and is the major feature of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Coyote Valley Dam Project. Lake Mendocino is impounded by Coyote Valley Dam, located on the East Fork of the Russian River, 0.8 mile upstream of the East Fork Russian River's confluence with the Russian River. Coyote Valley Dam is a rolled earth embankment. Lake Mendocino began storing water in 1959.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Mandatory restrictions: Water agencies say imposed summer cutbacks possible
By Wyatt Buchanan and Christopher Heredia, staff writers
San Francisco Chronicle – 4/12/07

More than 2 million Bay Area water users could face mandatory water restrictions this summer if they do not cut back on consumption now, the head of the San Francisco Public Utility Commission said Wednesday.

The Sierra snowpack -- the major water source for people in San Francisco, parts of the Peninsula, the South Bay and southern Alameda County -- is less than half of what it should be for this time of year. As of the beginning of the month, the snow pack was at 46 percent of normal.

Additionally, precipitation at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is at the lowest level since 1987 and at the fourth-lowest level since record-keeping started in 1919. The reservoir is the source San Francisco's water.

The water and snow levels are being measured every two weeks. Officials will look at the measurements at the end of May and make a recommendation on mandatory restrictions for San Francisco's 2.4 million users, said Susan Leal, general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission.

Mandatory restrictions could mean reducing consumption up to 20 percent. Customers who do not comply could face fines or have their water turned off.

Calls for conservation have also been sounded in the North Bay. The Sonoma County Water Agency is asking its 750,000 users in Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino counties to cut back voluntarily.

Lake Mendocino, which supplies those users, is predicted to be at its lowest level since the 1970s by September, said Brad Sherwood, spokesman for the water agency.

"It's basically going to be a puddle in the lake," Sherwood said.

The agency is not looking at mandatory restrictions, but "if conditions maintain and we don't get any major rains the rest of the spring, then anything is a possibility," he said.

The East Bay Municipal Water District, which serves 1.3 million customers, hasn't decided whether to call for voluntary conservation. District staff members plan to announce any such measures at a meeting on April 24, said Charles Hardy, spokesman for the district.

"Until then, we'll just watch and wait," Hardy said, adding that the last time the district had mandatory rationing was 1989-1991 and before that the mid-to-late 1970s. "We know it's dry and could lead to voluntary conservation. We just don't know yet."

In the Contra Costa Water District, officials are encouraging people to conserve but not making a formal request that they do so.

"We'll be rolling out a higher level of awareness for people to be careful, because while the situation is tenable this year, if next year is dry, it could be much more serious," said Patty Friesen, spokeswoman for the district, which provides water to 550,000 customers in fast-growing eastern and central Contra Costa County.

Other water agencies in Marin and Santa Clara counties do not anticipate any need for voluntary restrictions, representatives said.

Rainfall has been below average statewide, and Southern California is especially dry, said Maury Roos, chief hydrologist with the California Department of Water Resources.

Previous years have seen above-average rainfalls, however, which can help mitigate that for agencies with large groundwater storage capacity, he said.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission recommends a number of water-conservation steps, including: turning off the faucet when brushing teeth or washing dishes; taking shorter showers; cleaning sidewalks with a broom and not water; washing machines only with full loads; planting drought-tolerant plants; and replacing old toilets.

The last time Bay Area residents experienced mandatory water-use restrictions was during the six-year drought that ended in 1993.

San Francisco offers rebates for purchasing water-efficient washing machines and toilets at the Web site www.sfwater.org. #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/12/DROUGHT.TMP>

Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water
Associated Press – 4/11/07

The public utility that provides water to about a third of the San Francisco Bay area's population urged customers Wednesday to reduce consumption now to avoid drought limits later in the year.

Following California's fourth-driest winter on record, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission asked customers to cut their water use by 10 percent come June. The commission runs the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which pipes water from Yosemite National Park to 2.4 million customers in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Alameda counties.

"I'm nervous. We want to do what we can now and get people on track so we can avoid mandatory restrictions. We're way below normal," said General Manager Susan Leal.

While Hetch Hetchy is 75 percent full, the Sierra Nevada snowpack that feeds it stood at about 46 percent of normal and the Bay Area has received about half of the rain it would expect in an average year.

Regional water managers said that if wet weather does not arrive by the end of the year, the area might well be in for a repeat of its last drought, which ran from 1987 to 1992.

Worried about a long-term drought after the unusually dry winter, the city of Santa Cruz already has approved residential water use restrictions set to take effect May 1 that prohibit people from watering lawns during the day.

"We don't know what next winter's going to be like," said Bill Kocher, director of the Santa Cruz City Water Department. "If we did nothing this year with the horrible winter we had, I just think it would be careless."

Water managers in Sonoma County also urged customers Wednesday to decrease their water use after projections for September showed "dangerously low levels" in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir that serves about 750,000 people and feeds a river Chinook salmon use to spawn.

"We are looking at water levels that will be similar, if not worse than those we saw in 1976," said spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has not set an overall reduction target, but Sherwood said, "we are asking people to do everything they can at this point."

If San Francisco-area customers do not voluntarily conserve enough water by June, Leal said she would ask the Public Utilities Commission to approve its first mandatory curbs in 15 years.

Back then, the agency issued fines to customers who did not fix leaky faucets and imposed fees on those who used more than their allotted share of water, said spokesman Tony Winnicker.

Over the next two months, the utility's staff plans to evaluate which penalties would make most sense if the call for voluntary cuts in water use does not yield results.

"We are not in a crisis situation yet, and these requests for voluntary cutbacks are because we believe we don't need to be in a crisis this year," Winnicker said. #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/04/11/state/n083811D03.DTL&hw=water&sn=004&sc=491>

GOOD TO THE LAST DROP; Conservation tips: Although most are standard, showering with a friend still not bad idea

By Steve Rubenstein, staff writer

San Francisco Chronicle – 4/12/07

It must be serious, because the authorities say it's OK to shower with your spouse again.

Same for baths, assuming everything fits.

Rain and snow were so sporadic this winter that water could be scarce this summer. Water districts around the state have begun calling for "voluntary conservation," as if a two-person shower was an activity hard pressed for volunteers.

Unfortunately, many of the water-conservation tricks from past droughts will no longer work.

With most toilets, for example, it's no good any more to put a brick into the tank to take up space and save water. That's because modern low-flow toilets already use the minimum amount of water (1.6 gallons per flush) and using less will result in unfulfilling flushes.

Modern shower heads are low-flow, too, using 2.5 gallons per minute. Many already feature shut-off valves to allow patriotic folks to take "Navy showers" (soap up with the water off).

Older showers can be fitted with new, low-flow shower heads. At venerable Cole Fox Hardware on Fourth Street in San Francisco, low-flow shower heads were selling for \$4.99 to \$49.99. The higher priced shower heads featured "forceful, soothing droplets," otherwise known as water, and "relaxing, full-body showers," otherwise known as showers.

Of course, said hardware salesman Jon Pogorelskin, a high-flow shower can be turned low-flow with a 5-cent washer, which is good for conservation if not for the hardware trade.

Shorter showers and less-frequent showers also save water. So does reusing water, buying an on-off garden hose nozzle, running washing machines and dishwashers only when full and turning off the faucet while shaving and toothbrushing. Also good is building a backyard rainwater cistern which, Pogorelskin said, is a fancy name for an old trash barrel.

Voluntary conservation is the official term for the step before mandatory conservation, also known as rationing. On Wednesday, San Francisco water officials warned that if things get dire over the summer, rationing is possible. Water guzzlers could be fined or have their water cut off.

Some water users said they had learned from past droughts and were ready to pitch in again.

To keep his large lawn in Walnut Creek from dying, Al Sartor said he has learned to use the same water no fewer than three times.

"We reused bathwater by using our tub only -- no showers -- then siphoned the used water downstairs into the washing machine for reuse on laundry," he said. "Then we pumped the water from the washer out to the lawn."

Other water fans said they were already doing all they could. Herbert Marshall of Pleasanton said he installed a hydroponic vegetable garden after the last drought and isn't sure what else he can do.

"I could quit bathing, but my neighbors might complain," he said.

Kenneth Baird of Fremont said rationing "could mean the end of our backyard vegetable garden," and Jerry Lasky of Danville said water rationing would not do his swimming pool and his half-acre of landscaped grounds much good.

At Sloat Garden Center in San Francisco, salesman Alberto Garcilazo said the nursery was featuring a greater selection of succulents, cacti and other drought-resistant plants, in anticipation of customers seeking to thumb their green thumbs at the drought.

"Succulents and cactus can be very beautiful," Garcilazo said. "And you're going to spend less time in the garden."

The main problem with cactus is what happens when all the water comes back. Also, there are the stickers.

"You have to be careful," Garcilazo said. "No special secret. Just don't touch them."

Washing cars from the garden hose is a traditional water-waster, but washing cars at most commercial car washes isn't, because most recycle their water.

"Water's still good the second time around," said Patsy Vargas, cashier at South City Car Wash in South San Francisco, where a wash costs \$20 -- air freshener, dashboard cleaning and tire goop extra.

"We filter everything," she said. "Goes down the drain and gets processed and comes back. Same water, only brand new."

As for the double-occupancy shower, deputy operations chief Pam Jeane of the Sonoma County Water Agency said a drought is no time to be shy. The government fully approves of whatever consenting adults do to reduce consumption.

"Absolutely," she said. "Shower with a buddy. Everything helps." #

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/12/BAGDDP78EG1.DTL&hw=water&sn=001&sc=1000>

Water conservation urged; MENDOCINO COUNTY: Reservoir could drop to record-low level

By Glenda Anderson, staff writer
Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 4/12/07

Ukiah Valley's 31,000 residents could face a water shortage worse than the 1976-1977 drought if a combination of conservation and rainfall fails to adequately fill Lake Mendocino, water officials warn.

"It's real scary," said Judy Hatch, the Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District president. The agency holds Mendocino County's right to 8,000 acre-feet of Lake Mendocino water.

The lake currently holds 69,392 acre-feet and has a capacity of 117,232 acre-feet.

But water officials are predicting the lake will drop to 8,000 acre-feet by October unless use drops and more rain appears. The lake has never been that low, said Barbara Spazek, executive director of the Russian River district.

"We're looking at new territory," she said.

The dire prediction is based on current water storage in the lake and the rate of water decline between April and October in 2002, according to the Sonoma County Water Agency, which oversees water release.

In the past few years, the diversion that shunts Eel River flows into the Russian River, which feeds Lake Mendocino, has been reduced by about 30 percent in order to save threatened fish on the Eel.

The Sonoma County Water Agency's primary charge is to ensure there is enough water for Russian River fish, and a portion of that comes out of Lake Mendocino.

"We're going to go to the regulators and ask them what they want to do," said water agency engineer Chris Murray.

During the drought of 1977, the lake measured 12,122 acre-feet of water in October. There was so little water on the North Coast that year, people living in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties were asked to share bath water and use it to flush their toilets.

Officials of both the Sonoma and Russian River districts are asking residents and farmers to start conserving water immediately rather than bet on rainfall.

"Conservation needs to happen," said Pam Jeane, Sonoma County Water Agency's chief engineer of operations.

She said she doesn't know if it would be physically possible to take water from the lake if it drops to 8,000 acre-feet. But water removal is not authorized at that low level, she said.

While the future looks dry, Mendocino County officials say there's still time for the outlook to change.

"We'll see. It doesn't take a lot of rain to get the tributaries flowing into Lake Mendocino," said Janet Pauli, who heads the Inland Water and Power Commission. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070412/NEWS/70412002/1033/NEWS01>

SONOMA COUNTY: Voluntary reductions urged now to avoid crisis situation later
By Bleys W. Rose, staff writer
Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 4/12/07

Alarming low levels in water reservoirs that supply 600,000 people in Sonoma and northern Marin counties are prompting county Water Agency officials to call for immediate voluntary conservation steps.

They want you to:

Limit use of tap water.

Stop watering lawns and plants unless using irrigation controllers that automatically adjust for weather conditions.

Cut out the car wash.

Buy high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow toilets and showerheads, as well as front-loading clothes washers.

California officials said this season is the fourth-driest winter on record. The Santa Rosa area has received only 61 percent of normal rainfall, while the Bay Area has received only half the rain it would expect in an average year.

Water Agency officials said Wednesday that the lack of rainfall has caused low flow levels on the Russian River and prompted concern that fish, particularly endangered salmon, may not survive.

In Santa Rosa, only 17.57 inches of rain has fallen since July 1, far below the 30-year average of 28.88 inches.

The Water Agency's warning on "dangerously low water supply levels" came the same day that the public utility providing water to a third of the Bay Area announced water consumption reduction measures aimed at avoiding drought limits later this summer.

Hetch Hetchy reservoir stands at 75 percent full, but the Sierra snowpack that feeds it is only 46 percent of normal.

Sonoma County Water Agency officials plan to detail a full package of their own water conservation measures at a news conference today at 10:30 a.m. at Healdsburg Memorial Beach. Water levels on the Russian River are low, indicating fish will have a difficult time using the ladder there to swim upstream to spawn.

"These little forecasts of rain are not going to help us," Water Agency spokesman Brad Sherwood said. "Water conservation efforts by water contractors, customers and agricultural community are required."

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is asking customers to cut water use by 10 percent. Its advice to Bay Area residents includes installing low-flow shower heads, using drought-tolerant plants and watering gardens at night when evaporation is slower. #

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070412/NEWS/70412003/1033/NEWS01>

North Bay Hit Hard By Drought Concerns By Nick Smith

Apr. 11 - Members of the Sonoma County Water Agency are looking for more than cloudy skies - they want rain and want lots of it.

Chris Murray, engineer: "This is probably the most serious water supply situation we've seen in 30 years."

The agency says that Lake Mendocino may reach historically low water supply levels as early as September. According to his projection if dry weather conditions sustain through spring, levels will drop to approximately 10,000 acre feet. Lake Mendocino's current level is 69,000, it has a capacity of almost 123,000. Water storage has been falling at rates of 300 acre feet per day and that has them seriously concerned.

Chris Murray, Engineer: "We're projecting lake levels that will be lower than what we saw during the drought of 1976 and 1977. And if it's just a little bit worse than what we are projecting it can be more serious."

The water supplied by Lake Mendocino helps play a significant role in providing drinking water to three quarters of a million people in parts of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin Counties. Its waters are a great source of recreation but it also provides for the threatened Chinook salmon.

Sean White, Biologist: "We know that from years of study that Ukiah Valley and the area of Hopland is these fish prefer for optimal spawning habitat. And if there is no water left in that area then they can't get there and they can't complete their mission."

As deputy chief of operations, Pam says that sounding the alarm early is the best way to make everyone aware of the problem. Nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land is irrigated with water from the Russian River and urban water demand increases during the summer months due to outdoor watering. But Hillsburg resident Craig Harrington says he's willing to step up and do his part by reducing his water usage if it will make a difference.

Craig Harrington, homeowner: "I think people tend to over water period and so I don't think it's going to be that big of a deal here in the short run."

Pam Jeane, Deputy Chief Engineer: "Everybody who's using water off the Russian River system whether they are a person in a home, a person in a business or agriculture □ they can all help to alleviate the potential situation."

Chris Murray, Engineer: "If anybody out there is skilled in a rain dance, now is the time to start dancing."

Rainfall in the area has been off and on. So it's possible that someone somewhere heard Chris's cry for help. Even so forecasters don't expect to make the storm system through this area within the next month. And the areas that needs water most need a significant amount of rainfall.

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Media Advisory

For Immediate Release
April 10, 2007

Contact:
Brad Sherwood 707. 521.6204
Cell Phone: 707.570.7448

Dangerously Low Water Supply Levels Projected ***Agency to urge for immediate water conservation***

Santa Rosa, CA –The Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) on Thursday, April 12 will hold a press conference to announce the release of a projection that indicates dangerously low water supply levels in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall. The Agency will call for the immediate implementation of voluntary water conservation efforts by its water contractors, customers and agricultural community. Impacts of the low water supply levels will be addressed, including Russian River flow levels and fishery concerns. The year-long projection is based on past and projected rainfall patterns, Russian River flow requirements, and recent agricultural and municipal water demands in the Russian River above Healdsburg. The water released from Lake Mendocino plays a significant role in providing drinking water to 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, habitat for threatened salmon species and recreation.

Who: The Sonoma County Water Agency – Speakers to include:
Agency Board of Directors Tim Smith and Paul Kelley; Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer of operations; Chris Murray, principal engineer; Sean White, principal environmental specialist.

What: Announcement of Russian River Water Supply Projections

Date: Thursday, April 12, 2007

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: Healdsburg Memorial Beach – On the Russian River (near the fish ladder)
13839 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg, CA (directions attached)

RSVP: Contact Brad Sherwood at 707-521-6204 to verify your attendance – special parking will be provided at the site.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.

Directions to Press Conference at Healdsburg Memorial Beach

From San Francisco/Bay Area:

- 1) Take Highway 101 North towards Healdsburg
- 2) Take exit towards Healdsburg Avenue
- 3) Turn right onto Old Redwood Highway
- 4) Turn left into Healdsburg Memorial Beach

Follow the road through the parking lot to the Russian River. Parking will be available near the Russian River. The press conference will take place near the Russian River and fish ladder.

From Eureka/Northern California:

- 1) Take Highway 101 South towards Healdsburg
- 2) Take Westside Road exit toward Guerneville
- 3) Turn left onto Westside road
- 4) Stay straight to go onto Mill Street
- 5) Turn right onto Healdsburg Avenue/ Old Redwood Highway
- 6) Turn right into Healdsburg Memorial Beach

Follow the road through the parking lot to the Russian River. Parking will be available near the Russian River. The press conference will take place near the Russian River and fish ladder.

Contact:

Brad Sherwood

Programs Specialist

Sonoma County Water Agency

Phone: 707.521.6204 (office)

Cell Phone: 707.570.7448

(04-11) 11:46 PST -- The Sonoma County Water Agency is calling for immediate voluntary water conservation because of "dangerously low water supply levels" expected in Lake Mendocino this summer and fall, according to agency spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The low water level prediction is based on past and projected rainfall patterns, Russian River flow requirements and recent agricultural and municipal water demands in the Russian River above Healdsburg, Sherwood said.

Water released from the lake is critical to the drinking water supply for 600,000 residents in portions of Sonoma and Marin counties, to the habitat of threatened salmon species and for recreation at the lake and along the Russian River.

Sherwood said a 33 percent reduction in water released from the Eel River to the Russian River also is affecting the projected water shortage and that the water level will be near the bottom of the lake in September when Chinook salmon travel up the Russian River to spawn.

The call for immediate water conservation applies to contractors, customers and the agricultural community, Sherwood said.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/baycitynews/roundup.DTL&hw=Sonoma+County+Water+Agency&sn=001&sc=1000>

Bay Area water conservation urged now to avoid restrictions later
Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer
Wednesday, April 11, 2007

(04-11) 15:13 PDT SAN FRANCISCO -- More than 2 million Bay Area water users could face mandatory water restrictions this summer if they do not cut back on consumption now, the head of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission said Wednesday.

The Sierra snowpack -- the major source of water for people in San Francisco, parts of the Peninsula, the South Bay and southern Alameda County -- is less than half of what it should be for this time of year. As of the beginning of the month, the snow pack was at 46 percent of normal.

Additionally, precipitation at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is at the lowest level since 1987 and at the fourth lowest level in history since 1919, when records began to be recorded. The reservoir is the source San Francisco's water.

The water and snow levels are being measured every two weeks. Officials will look at the measurements at the end of May and make a recommendation on mandatory restrictions for San Francisco's 2.4 million users, said Susan Leal, general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission.

Mandatory restrictions could mean reducing consumption by up to 20 percent. Customers who do not comply could face fines or have their water turned off.

Calls for conservation have also been sounded in the North Bay. The Sonoma County Water Agency is asking its 750,000 water users in Sonoma, Marin and Mendocino counties to cut back voluntarily.

Lake Mendocino, which supplies those users, is predicted to be at its lowest level since the 1970s by September, said Brad Sherwood, spokesman for the water agency.

"It's basically going to be a puddle in the lake," Sherwood said.

The agency is not looking at mandatory restrictions, but "if conditions maintain and we don't get any major rains the rest of the spring, then anything is a possibility," he said.

Other water agencies in Marin and Santa Clara counties do not anticipate any need for voluntary restrictions, representatives of those agencies said.

Rainfall has been below average statewide, and Southern California is especially dry, said Maury Roos, chief hydrologist with the California Department of Water Resources.

Previous years have seen above average rainfalls, however, which can help mitigate that for agencies with large groundwater storage capacity, he said.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission recommends a number of water-conservation steps, including: turning off the faucet when brushing teeth or washing dishes; taking shorter showers; cleaning sidewalks with a broom and not water; filling washing machines only with full loads; planting drought-tolerant plants; and replacing old toilets.

San Francisco offers rebates for purchasing water efficient washing machines and toilets at the Web site www.sfwater.org.

E-mail Wyatt Buchanan at wbuchanan@sfchronicle.com.

Dry winter produces concern about conserving Bay Area water
Associated Press
Wednesday, April 11, 2007

(04-11) 14:55 PDT San Jose, Calif. (AP) -- The public utility that provides water to about a third of the San Francisco Bay area's population urged customers Wednesday to reduce consumption now to avoid drought limits later in the year.

Following California's fourth-driest winter on record, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission asked customers to cut their water use by 10 percent come June. The commission runs the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which pipes water from Yosemite National Park to 2.4 million customers in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Alameda counties.

"I'm nervous. We want to do what we can now and get people on track so we can avoid mandatory restrictions. We're way below normal," said General Manager Susan Leal.

While Hetch Hetchy is 75 percent full, the Sierra Nevada snowpack that feeds it stood at about 46 percent of normal and the Bay Area has received about half of the rain it would expect in an average year.

Regional water managers said that if wet weather does not arrive by the end of the year, the area might well be in for a repeat of its last drought, which ran from 1987 to 1992.

Worried about a long-term drought after the unusually dry winter, the city of Santa Cruz already has approved residential water use restrictions set to take effect May 1 that prohibit people from watering lawns during the day.

"We don't know what next winter's going to be like," said Bill Kocher, director of the Santa Cruz City Water Department. "If we did nothing this year with the horrible winter we had, I just think it would be careless."

Water managers in Sonoma County also urged customers Wednesday to decrease their water use after projections for September showed "dangerously low levels" in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir that serves about 750,000 people and feeds a river Chinook salmon use to spawn.

"We are looking at water levels that will be similar, if not worse than those we saw in 1976," said spokesman Brad Sherwood.

The Sonoma County Water Agency has not set an overall reduction target, but Sherwood said, "we are asking people to do everything they can at this point."

If San Francisco-area customers do not voluntarily conserve enough water by June, Leal said she would ask the Public Utilities Commission to approve its first mandatory curbs in 15 years.

Back then, the agency issued fines to customers who did not fix leaky faucets and imposed fees on those who used more than their allotted share of water, said spokesman Tony Winnicker.

Over the next two months, the utility's staff plans to evaluate which penalties would make most sense if the call for voluntary cuts in water use does not yield results.

"We are not in a crisis situation yet, and these requests for voluntary cutbacks are because we believe we don't need to be in a crisis this year," Winnicker said.

Water agency calls for conservation
Elizabeth Larson
Capital Press Staff Writer

SANTA ROSA - A Northern California water agency is asking water users to immediately begin conserving water due to lack of rain, less water upstream, and increasing agriculture and urban water demand.

The Sonoma County Water Agency announced today that it needs to achieve conservation levels of 10 to 15 percent because of the potential for historically low water levels upstream in Lake Mendocino.

"We are taking a proactive role in educating the public, agricultural community and our water contractors about these low water supply projections released," said Tim Smith, agency director and Sonoma County supervisor. "Now is the time for everyone to step up water conservation efforts."

Lake Mendocino, which the agency reports is now at 69,000 acre feet, is projected to drop to about 10,000 acre feet unless there's significant spring rainfall or a reduction in water use.

The 1976 drought was reportedly the last time Lake Mendocino was at a similar water level, the agency reported.

Last fall, Pacific Gas & Electric discovered that it was releasing too much water through its Potter Valley hydroelectric project, according to spokesman David Eisenhower. That project diverts water from the Eel River and into the upper Russian River Basin, eventually reached Lake Mendocino.

Eisenhower said that, in order to comply with its regulatory license, PG&E had to reduce flows by 33 percent, which led to concerns downstream for agricultural and municipal users alike.

Those conditions, combined with rainfall levels that are at 60 percent of normal, has led to the agency's calls for conservation.

In recent weeks, the agency reports that water storage in Lake Mendocino has fallen by between 200 and 300 acre feet per day.

Lake Mendocino provides drinking water for an estimated 750,000 residents in portions of Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties. Water from the lake that flows into the Russian River irrigates nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land.

The water supply from Lake Mendocino and the Russian River is expected to come under greater strain as the warmer summer months arrive, at about the same time as the area's

endangered Chinook salmon will begin to migrate and spawn in the upper Russian River, one of the agency's major concerns.

Sean White, Sonoma County Water Agency's senior environmental specialist, said they will monitor the salmon's migration and spawning patterns in order to avoid negative impacts on the fish.

Agency officials also reported that they will immediately begin meeting with state and federal officials to address their concerns about water, and will hold public workshops in the coming months.

A dry summer predicted
The Press Democrat

Bay Area water officials -- including those who run the Sonoma County Water Agency -- said water supplies are alarmingly low after an unusually dry winter and conservation will be necessary to make it through the summer.

That means limiting tap water use, cutting back on outdoor irrigation, letting the car stay dirty and buying high-efficiency appliances such as low-flow showerheads and toilets and front-loading washing machines.

It's a voluntary request for now, but that could change. The general manager of San Francisco's Public Utilities Commission warned that mandatory water-use restrictions could be necessary by the end of May.

-- Staff reports

Water fears
Editorial
The Press Democrat

Why even one dry year is enough to scare Californians

"One dry year does not normally constitute a drought in California, but serves as a reminder of the need to plan for droughts."

-- California Department of Water Resources, "Droughts in California"

Reassurances by state hydrologists aside, Californians are nervous. Unless there is significant rainfall by June 30, this year will be the fourth driest on record.

Normally one dry year -- especially one that follows one of the wettest years on record -- wouldn't result in panic.

But something has changed in California, and residents are no longer as sanguine as they once were about sunny winters.

Perhaps it's because they see every unusual weather event through the prism of global warming and wonder whether it's a harbinger of future disasters.

Drought is a special concern in the West: As reported recently, scientists worry that a warmer climate could create La Niña conditions that led to the "megadroughts" (two or three decades long) that occurred in California between 900 and 1400.

Perhaps it's because the state has added 6.4 million new residents since the last drought ended in 1992. Even though Californians have become more adept at conserving, that's a lot more people who will be depending on limited water supplies.

Perhaps it's because many people have already made the "easy" changes. They've installed low-flow toilets and shower heads, they've switched to drip irrigation and have installed drought-resistant plants. How else can we cut back? they wonder.

Perhaps it's because they've lost confidence in the ability of elected officials to address long-term problems.

After all, examples of government process and delay abound -- especially when it comes to water.

The Sonoma County Water Agency and the cities it serves have spent several years developing an agreement for future water supplies; it took Santa Rosa nearly two decades to study and build a wastewater project; it took three decades for Warm Springs Dam to be constructed after the idea was proposed.

So, it's no surprise that in mid-April, when water officials in Sonoma County and statewide are urging conservation, Californians are listening -- and worrying.

<http://www1.pressdemocrat.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070414/NEWS/704140319&SearchID=73278238707386>

Editorial: Making water conservation a way of life; The message from North Bay water officials to residents in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties last week was clear: we must voluntarily and immediately reduce water use ...

Editorial

Petaluma Argus Courier – 4/17/17

The message from North Bay water officials to residents in Sonoma, Mendocino and Marin counties last week was clear: we must voluntarily and immediately reduce water use by 10 to 15 percent now, or face mandatory restrictions later this year.

California is on track to have the fourth driest rainy season on record. The dry winter is predicted to result in dangerously low levels in the Russian River water system that supplies water to local residents. Last year, Petaluma had received 40.19 inches of rain by this date. So far this year, we've received only 13.17 inches.

Lake Mendocino, the reservoir that supplies water to Sonoma County, is currently projected to drop to 10,000 acre-feet of stored water — the lowest level in more than 30 years. This is due to lack of rainfall, reduced water flows from PG&E's Potter Valley hydroelectric project, and continued high demand from urban and agricultural users in the North Bay.

Petaluma gets the bulk of its water from the Sonoma County Water Agency, a public entity run by county supervisors, which also supplies cities from Healdsburg to Novato using wells located deep beneath the Russian River near Forestville. The Russian River, which used to run dry in the summer months, has been kept artificially full year-round since a dam was completed in the 1920s that diverts water out of the Eel River and into the Russian River.

But due to orders from federal regulatory agencies tasked with protecting fisheries habitat, diversions from the Eel River to Lake Mendocino have been reduced by 33 percent this year so that Chinook salmon will be able to migrate and spawn in the Russian River. That will mean much less water available to Sonoma County residents.

If we don't cut back on our water use now and if we don't get some substantial late-season rainfall, mandatory restrictions will become a reality this summer.

Longtime Petaluma residents will recall that this has happened before. Thirty years ago, two consecutive dry seasons — 1975-76 and 1976-77 — resulted in the driest year on record and mandatory water restrictions were enacted. In Petaluma, this included using outdoor water hoses every other day — an odd-and-even system based on the day on the calendar and which side of town you lived on.

Yet the prospect of drought has always been a reality in California. Ongoing global climate changes promise to exacerbate the problem in coming years. There are also 13 million more people living in California today than in 1977, and Sonoma County's

population is up by about 200,000 since that time. So there are a lot more people turning on the tap than there used to be.

Unlike 1977, today water conservation practices have become much more of a way of life due to public policy. Low-flow toilets, drip irrigation systems, landscaping with drought-tolerant plants and common-sense water usage are steps that many residents have already taken.

If we are to have enough water to drink, shower, flush our toilets and water our plants and trees later this year, we all need to do more to conserve water now. Here are some suggestions by the county water agency and the city water department:

- Reduce your irrigation system run times by lowering the minutes per cycle or reducing the days per week the system turns on.
- Do not hose off your driveway or patio. Use a broom to sweep instead.
- Take your car to a car wash that recycles water.
- Wait until you have a full load of laundry or dishes before you start your washer.
- Call the city water department to schedule a free inspection to evaluate your water use and get water-saving recommendations.

Call 1-800-548-1882 to schedule a free residential survey or 778-4507 to schedule a commercial survey. The county water agency provides a similar service. Call 547-1910.

- Upgrade to a new high-efficiency clothes washer and get a rebate on qualified models.
- Tune up your irrigation system.
- Install new high-efficiency toilets. They use 20 percent less water than standard toilets. Rebates are available.
- Choose native and low-water using plants for your landscape. These plants thrive with less water.
- Cover your pool or hot tub when not in use.
- Check for and fix leaks. See the Green Team column by David Iribarne on page C7 of this issue.

Taking sensible steps to conserve water now will help us avoid having to face far more severe consequences later on. #

<http://www1.arguscourier.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070418/OPINION01/70417038&template=printart>

Water conservation urged

Water agency asking public to decrease usage 10 to 15 percent

By D. Ashley Verrill

Healdsburg Tribune

Conserve - Sonoma County Water Agency Director and Fourth District Supervisor Paul Kelley told a press conference audience last week that future Lake Mendocino water levels could be the lowest in history if water users do not make drastic conservation efforts now. SWCA is asking users to reduce their demand by 10-15 percent in the next few months. Photo by D. Ashley Verrill

Many of Sonoma County's urban water users could face mandatory water restrictions if usage is not reduced enough to compensate for projected water levels in Lake Mendocino, which officials say have been falling at a rate of at least 200 acre feet per day and could reach all-time lows by late fall.

The city of Healdsburg, however, has its own water rights on the Russian River, so residents in the city would not be affected by the mandates. Lower flows in the river could still affect the amount of available water, since the city has wells that draw from the underflow of the Russian River.

“Luckily for us, someone had the foresight to get the water rights in the ‘50s, so when push comes to shove we have priority for water,” said the city of Healdsburg's senior engineer for public works, Jim Flugum.

Flugum said even though this is true, it is still important that water conservation efforts extend to this area, and the city will likely send out information mailers in May. During the summer, Healdsburg also uses its municipal water wells along Dry Creek.

Last week, the Sonoma County Water Agency staged a press conference along side the fish ladder below Healdsburg's Veterans Memorial Beach.

“This is the lowest we (will have ever) seen Lake Mendocino,” Fourth District Supervisor and Sonoma County Water Agency Director Paul Kelley said at the press conference. “Even during the 1976 drought.”

The agency is asking water users to voluntarily decrease their usage by 10 to 15 percent in order to avoid mandatory restrictions in the future, but current projections for early fall put Lake Mendocino at approximately 11 percent of its 69,000 acre-feet capacity. Releases from the Ukiah reservoir determine the Russian River's flows between Lake Mendocino and the confluence with Dry Creek.

“If you can imagine driving down a dirt road that is what the river will be,” said the agency's Chief of Water Resources Planning Unit, Chris Murray. “We literally cannot release water from the lake at that level.”

Ironically, Murray said this year was considered a normal rain year because the state bases the calculation on inflows to Lake Pillsbury, which feeds into Lake Mendocino.

Lake Mendocino levels more accurately reflect the Russian River's available supplies, however. State requirements mandate that the river flow at a rate of at least 185 cubic feet per second during a normal year, and water must be released from reservoirs to keep the flow at this rate. If the lakes do not have enough water to release both to water users and to the river flow then commercial and agricultural users will literally not receive water.

Currently, the Sonoma County Water Agency provides water to nine cities and special districts in Sonoma and Marin counties, with approximately 600,000 customers. The agency received the water rights to the Russian River system from the state when it was formed in 1949.

The Russian River originates in central Mendocino County, approximately 15 miles north of Ukiah and its main channel is 110 miles long and has five primary tributaries. Lake Pillsbury, Lake Mendocino, and Lake Sonoma were created as water reservoirs for the Russian River system, and fill based on the amount of water flowing from the Russian River, Eel River and Dry Creek watershed. In order for certain endangered species of salmon and trout to spawn, the flow must remain at a certain level during the early fall months, and officials are worried this the fish may have no where to go.

“We could lose an entire generation of chinook salmon if they do not have a successful migration and spawning period,” said the agency's senior environmental specialist Sean White. “Unfortunately this time period is exactly the same we have projected the lake to be at its lowest.”

Last year, the agency counted approximately 4,500 chinook salmon near the Wohler Bridge on the Russian River during spawning season.

Most of the stream flow in the Russian River during the summer is provided by water diverted from the Eel River as part of the PG&E Potter Valley Project, but this year's flows will be reduced by 33 percent because of federal regulations that were changed in 2004 to protect the Eel Russian River fisheries.

“We are already halfway through the rainy season and it looks like we are not getting anymore rain. It will be creepy,” Murray said. “Like a sandy plain with a wet spot in the middle.”

Besides the new federal regulations on the Potter Valley Project and a dry rainy season, nearly 60,000 acres of agricultural land in Sonoma and Mendocino counties are irrigated with water from the upper Russian River, and the demand will only increase though the summer.

The agency is attempting to have the flow requirements changed at the state and federal level, but they may not be able to make the change before it is too late.

“We really want to avoid mandatory restrictions, but we just might have to if we don't see a significant change,” said the agency's spokesperson, Brad Sherwood.

Some ways to conserve water include things as simple as checking your water meter to see if you have leaks or sweeping debris away from your driveway or decks instead of using a hose.

The water agency also recommends that you delay new planting projects and irrigate in two short cycles rather than one long one to decrease run-off. Some cities offer incentives for purchasing high-efficiency toilets, washers, showerheads and dishwashers.

For a list of special water-saving programs and water-saving tools, see the agency's Web site at www.scwa.ca.gov.